

# ELECTORAL LAW APPLYING TO CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

The party or bloc of parties securing any amount over 50 percent of the popular vote gets 380 out of the 590 seats in the lower house of parliament (Chamber of Deputies). In case no party or bloc of parties secures a majority, the seats are awarded on a proportional basis.

*There are 237 Senate seats.  
The voting age for the Chamber of  
Deputies is 21, for the Senate, 25.*

The Italian Elections

About all that can be said as of the moment about the Italian elections which ended yesterday is that the De Gasperi government, if it scores a victory at all will have only a paper-thin majority in the Senate and will thus have an uncertain future.

As of the time I left my office, the Premier's middle-of-the-road coalition was holding a slim 50.1 percent lead against the combined opposition in the voting for the Italian Senate. Counting of the vote for the more important Chamber of Deputies will follow, but is expected to carry out the same pattern. The returns are still incomplete, but it would be foolhardy to see in them any cause for real optimism.

Nearly 28,500,000 Italians, a record-breaking participation of about 94 percent of those eligible, cast their ballots although only some 26,000,000 figure in the senate count. At latest report, 21,389,050 ballots had been counted, or about four-fifths.

The fact of the matter is that as of the present, the Communists and leftwing Nenni Socialists are holding their own, and possibly somewhat improving over the 35 percent which they polled in the 1951-52 local elections. Their vote in the last national elections in 1948 had been 31 percent.

The Monarchists and Neo-Fascists are definitely showing more strength, and it is this growth in support, all of it at the expense of the center coalition, which has eaten away <sup>at</sup> De Gasperi's slim hold. The rightist vote in 1951-52 was 12 percent, as against only five in 1948.

There have been protests in Rome that the Interior Ministry is holding back on the election results.

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If the present trend is maintained, the probable parliamentary outcome will be:

1. An easy working majority for De Gasperi in the Chamber of Deputies, under Italy's unusual electoral law which gives a large bonus to any party which wins even a minute majority. Thus with as little as 50.01 percent of the vote he would obtain 64.5 percent of the seats.

2. A virtual stalemate in the Senate, where there is a modified proportional representation system which closely reflects the popular vote.

De Gasperi needs firm control over both houses if he is to govern effectively. His prospects of making a deal to give him control over the senate in effect narrow down to:

1. Alliance with the Monarchists on the right, which is favored by certain elements in his own Christian Democratic Party. This would alienate many of his present supporters, both in the three minor center parties and in his own, and might in the end cost him more votes than he would gain.

2. Alliance with the Nenni Socialists, Pietro Nenni, their leader has long been sympathetic to Moscow and has played ball politically with the Communists, but recently he has made De Gasperi several overtures. Such a coalition has the drawback that it would antagonize many rightwing Christian Democrats and presumably lose the Premier the support of Catholic Action as well.

It should be underlined that both these prospective partners oppose the commitment of the present government to cooperate with NATO and EDC. Alliance with either would thus be impossible without some change in official policy.

De Gasperi himself told an American shortly before the

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election that rather than accepting either of these alternatives, he would call a new election. This he would presumably do on the assumption that, with the Chamber of Deputies already firmly in hand, enough of those who voted Monarchist on Sunday and Monday could be enticed back to give him a workable Senate majority as well.